

MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY TRAINING IN INDIA: PLENTY AMIDST SCARCITY – A CASE STUDY IN INDIAN SCENARIO

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Abstract

Keywords:

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Media and Information
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Indian media and information sectors are witnessing exponential growth which eventually raises pertinent questions, such as - are Indians equipped enough to handle this media explosion or information revolution? Are they suitably empowered to distinguish fact vs fiction / real vs reel / bias vs hidden agenda / advertisement vs advertorial vs paid news? Above factors lead to a felt need for empowering ordinary media users to sensitise them to use media messages judiciously. In this regard, a Needs Assessment Study was conducted to ascertain the need of the media and information literacy programme. The Needs Assessment Study relied on three data sets to establish the need for the programme on Media Literacy. The first data set is, the UNESCO had recommended media and information literacy indicators through a report in 2013. The same indicators are applied in the first part of the study, data pertinent to indicators are sourced through available secondary resources. The second data set is, a survey conducted among Indian media academics in order to get the educational perspectives of Indian scenario on media literacy. Thirdly, the Focus Group Discussion by inviting experts of those who are working in the areas of MIL, this FGD meeting was meant to develop the curriculum based on first two data sets. The results from these three data sets will be presented in a full paper format.

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1. Introduction

The growth in the media industry has seen and going to witness significant development in India. This signifies the potential of media and communication system in Indian society and likely to influence its social milieu.

Indian Media and Entertainment industry was growing at the rate¹ of 13.4% in 2018, and it is expected to continue in 14% rate for next couple of years – its revenue is expected to cross USD 33.6 billion in 2021. The global average growth rate was 4.2%² for the period 2016-21. In comparison, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of India was around 7.3% in 2018-19 years and it is expected around 7.5% in 2019-20³. Correspondingly, the growth percentage of Indian media industry translated into 780 million television viewers⁴, 407 million newspaper readers⁵ and 159 million radio listeners⁶, and 566 million internet users⁷. There is a dominant reach of mass media in India, particularly television and digital media. Moreover, there are many 'big players' in the various social sectors to influence public opinion in favour of their interest or otherwise, with the help of spin doctors through mainstream media. These 'influence' may not be so latent and may not be able to distinguishable by normal readers/listeners/viewers/users.

If we add all these millions (1912 millions or 1.9 billion), which indicates that every Indian is hooked to more than one or more medium for his/her Information, Education and Entertainment needs. But in reality, that statement is not true. However, it is not easy to reject the idea that major portion of Indian population is isolated from mainstream media.

In the 21st Century, access to technology is one of the modern day indicator to measure the level of population's access to various information outlets, media is one of the dominant avenue among it. There are number of indicators to measure the level of accessibility to technology in general in India - namely size of computing population, prevalence of net penetration and tele-density.

According to National Sample Survey Organisation data of 2014⁸, 'An estimated 8.8% of the rural population has computing ability. In urban areas, the figure is nearly four times higher, at 30.2%.' The statistics indicate that a vast number of Indian population is not within the ambit of computing world, nearly 70% of them. However, according to a news report⁷, India had 566 million Internet subscribers in December 2018. Based on a population count of 1.37 billion, it

translates this into 41.1% Internet subscribers. Internet subscriptions in rural India gets 25%. Yet, this data reinforces the size of disconnected majority population in India. The 2017-18 annual report⁹ of TRAI state that, 'urban tele-density growth rate decreased from 171.80% to 165.90% while rural tele-density increased from 56.91% to 59.05%.'

Dissecting these figures from the gender perspective gives a contrasting picture about the glaring differences exist among men and women. Though the mass media based gender-wise details are unavailable, hence the prevalent indicators of technological access would give an overall scenario gender differences in Indian context. Compared to any other technological diffusion, mobile has revolutionised the media/information access in India. Within the population, 43% of men owns mobile while only 28% of women has mobile ownership¹⁰. Similarly, male Indian internet users are 71% and women's share is the remaining 29%. In the urban context, the difference between men and women in terms of net access is 62:38, but in rural India it is 88:12¹¹.

Similarly, the imbalance is being witnessed in other domains of internet too - one in every five e-commerce users are women, only 24% Facebook users are women, only 8% of handles are generate by the women in Twitter (46% of tweets are from men rest from other entities)¹². These technological indicators indirectly reflect the media accessibility status of women in Indian context, and inherently there are sociological issues exist as a barrier for the women to reap the benefits as like men who enjoys in the same socio-cultural milieu.

These two above scenarios - millions of users/readers/audience and majority of the disconnected population - have indicate that the availability of plenty of media presence and equal presence of scenario in which large section of the Indian population yet to hook into the media and information network.

Such exponential growth of media and equally large disconnected section of population raises various questions, such as - are the media users equipped enough to handle this media explosion or information revolution? Are they suitably empowered to distinguish fact vs fiction / real vs reel / bias vs hidden agenda / advertisement vs advertorial vs paid news? What needs to be done to connect those disconnected sections? What skillsets need to be provided in order to make the

members of disconnected sections into ademocratically active citizens? The only possible solutions to empower them with the media and information skills to enable them become savvy ace users/readers/audience.

2. Need of Media Literacy Training:

Above factors lead to a felt need for empowering common media users to sensitise them to use media messages judiciously. Canadian Association for Media Literacy¹³ in their international conference held in 1989 adopted the definition for media literacy education such as, “The goal of the media literacy curriculum must be to develop a literate person who is able to read, analyse, evaluate, and produce communications in a variety of media (print, TV, computers, the arts, etc.).”

Media literacy enhances the capacity of people to enjoy their fundamental human rights, in particular as expressed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Media literacy equips citizens with competencies needed to seek and enjoy the full benefits of this fundamental human right.¹⁴

It is not enough for common media users to merely understand media. Media and information literacy aims to empower them to critically negotiate meanings, engage with the problems of misrepresentation and under-representations, and produce their own alternative media. Addressing issues of inequality and injustice in media representations can be a powerful starting place for problem-posing transformative education.

Internationally all signatories of UN agreed to meet target of Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, among 17 goals and 169 targets two are very closely associated with the Media and Information Literacy – Digital Literacy and Women Empowerment through ICT. These two issues are one of the focus areas of this study.

3. Needs Assessment Study:

The Needs Assessment Study relied on three data sets to establish the need for the programme on Media Literacy, based on which developing a curriculum framework for the programme. The first data set is, the UNESCO had recommended media and information literacy indicators

through a report in 2013. The same indicators are applied in the first part of the study, data pertinent to indicators are sourced through available secondary resources. UNESCO indicators are used to establish that India is witnessing an information revolution. Vast number of ordinary common people are exposed to incredible amount of information through various media vehicles.

The second data set is, a survey conducted among India based professionals from media and information fields in order to get the educational perspectives of Indian scenario on media and information literacy. Survey was conducted to ascertain the capability and potential of users to handle information access and creation, and to get overview of training needs to be imparted under this programme. Efforts were also made to get the broad view on the target audience for this programme. Third, a Focus Group Discussion was conducted at New Delhi to develop and finalise the curriculum framework. The results from these three data sets are presented below.

Summary of Indicators of Media and Information Literacy. According to UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy Indicators Assessment Tools, the following indicators are available in Indian context:

1] Government owned All India Radio has 420 stations, that caters to nearly 92% in terms of geographical area¹⁵. There are 369 private FM channels in India, which covers nearly 98% of country's geographical area¹⁶. There are about 583 community radio licenses were issues, out of which 321 are in operation¹⁷.

2] Nearly 1986 films are certified in India, with the Hindi, Telugu and Tamil are leading language based films. India is considered to be the world's leading film producer in an annual basis (Hindi got certification for 364 films, Tamil 304, Telugu 294, Kannada 220 in 2017)¹⁸. As on 2015, there are about 6000 indoor cinema theatres in India, out of which 2100 are multiplex theatres¹⁹.

3] According to Ministry of Information & Broadcasting of Government of India, there are about 906 television channels are available in Indian viewers²⁰.

4] As on January 2017, there are 970 million active users among the total of 1078 million mobile users in India with the population of 1.3 billion people²¹.

5] In India, there are 566 million internet users as on December 2018, ie. 41.1%% of Indian population⁷. India has world's second largest internet user base after China²².

6] There are 118 thousand registered publications in India, out of which 17.5 thousand newspapers are being circulated in various languages. All these publications' claimed circulation as on 2017-18 was 43 million copies²³.

7] Basic computer skills is part and parcel of Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE - Government of India regulatory body for the School Curriculum) school curriculum among secondary and higher-secondary level classes²⁴. The topics covered are, from the basics of computers to high end programming²⁵. There is a national plan for educational reforms and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) action plan for school curriculum. But there is no law specific to ICT School curriculum.

8] Every CBSE schools as well as majority of the state board schools does have a dedicated Library section²⁶, in addition to physical library, there are many avenues of access to digital libraries.

9] National Council for Educational Research for Training (NCERT) is running a specialised off-campus training programme for school teachers on computers²⁷. Department of Electronics and Accreditation of Computer Courses (DOEACC)²⁸ of Government of India, is running subsidised computer education in a non-formal mode. Many higher educational institutions are facilitating and offering extension education in the form of computer education and computer literacy.

10] Computer course is part of higher secondary school level specialisation subject and in the past three years Media education too become one of the elective for the higher secondary school students in a CBSE system.

11] Ministry of I&B is a controlling agency for broadcast industry, in terms of granting licensing and monitoring the contents of broadcast media. There is no independent regulatory body for

broadcast industry, however there is an industry sponsored broadcast association through which its members self-regulates its operation.

12] Unlike broadcast industry, press in India is under a systematic regulatory mechanism. Press Council is an autonomous body which has limited power to scrutinise and penalise its members.

13] There is a TRAI which regulates the technical aspects of telecom industry. Unlike press, there is no media regulatory body specifically for online media. IT Act 2000 is the legal remedy available for the government to control the digital and online medium.

14] There is no broad umbrella organization that oversees print, broadcast and online media in India. However, there is growing demand for a media council to oversee cross media platform.

15] TRAI recommends time allocation for advertisements on broadcast media. Monitoring cell of Ministry of I&B monitors legal provisions on content. Press Council takes care about the readers' complaints of common person. There is a Media Monitoring cell in respective states to oversee media operations during elections - state as well as parliament elections.

16] Code of conduct of press is monitored by the press council of India. Press Council does legal provisions on content, monitoring advertising for newspapers and proposing policies and regulations for press.

17] There are legal law and provisions for broadcast media as well as for press medium.

18] There is no prescribed qualifications to become a journalists in India. But that is required for library professionals as well as communication specialists.

19] There are legal provisions for domestic as well as for foreign media cross-ownership patterns in India.

20] Right to Information (RTI) is one of the efficient means facilitated by the state as well as central government organisations. There is a structured framework needs to be followed under the RTI act to process queries submitted under this act.

Through the above indicators, India is witnessing a massive information explosion. India ranks top in many fields – highest number of print circulation in the world, highest number of film production in a year and highest number of mobile subscribers. Second highest number of internet users in India. More than half of Indian population is clued to various television channels.

On the other hand, except print and film, all other media are technically regulated by various agencies. There is no credible media councils to oversee cross media platforms in India. In this given context, the business interests are tend to dominate in order to garner huge profits. There are many incidences that support this trend.

In this scenario, it is expected that media users are using these massive information judiciously. Since there is no adequate training available in India on media literacy front, it is assumed that majority of common media users are considered to be a passive observers. This trend indicates the dire need to empower the common media users to become a media literate.

4. Survey Findings:

An online survey questionnaire was prepared in consultation with many senior media academicians. Same was put online with the help of Google Form. The weblink of the survey was then intimated to the people who are closely associated with the media and information science field in Indian context. As well, the same link was shared on the social media groups which are operating focus is closely related to MIL. In all these efforts, the survey link was shared with the nearly 400 people. The link was active for a month in order to get sufficient responses to gauge the feedback on the requirement of MIL training in Indian context.

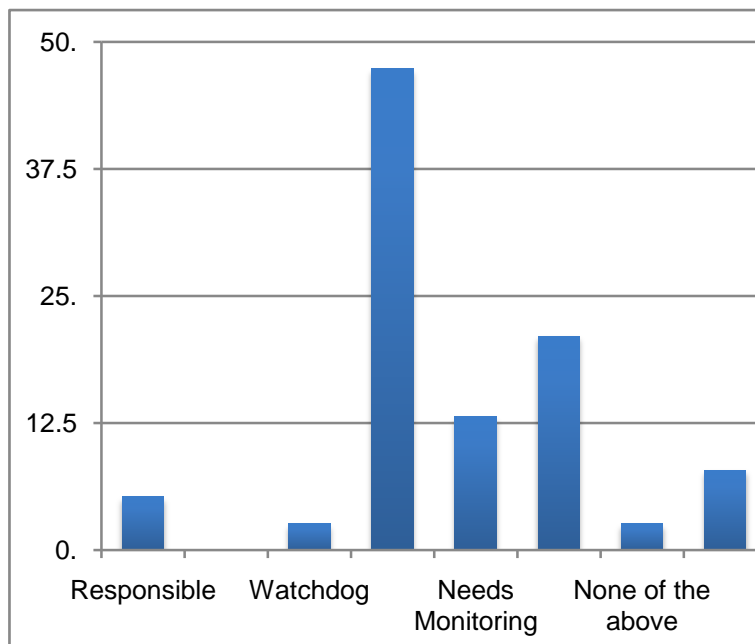
In all, there were 37 responses received after a sustained efforts to reach the particular group of professionals who works in the areas of MIL. Out of 37 respondents, the mean age was 39 years. Their mean working experience was 13 years.

Almost every respondent agreed that they were aware and familiar to media literacy concepts. Their agreement gives credible value to their views and opinions on this survey objective.

Each one of the respondents gave their own interpretation of the term Media Literacy. Through a text clouding process, a text map is created based on respondents' views. The text map indicates that, respondents were broadly defining the term media literacy as, to understand media and its messages, the ability to analyse media content critically, to aware about meaning of media content and its creations, and to capable to create and construct their own content.

4.1 The role of mass media in the contemporary Indian context

Nearly 47% of the respondents stated that the Indian mass media is business oriented and their main operations are meant to make profit with the suitable content that attracts huge ratings and in turn that brings more numbers of advertisements. Almost two-thirds of the respondents agreed

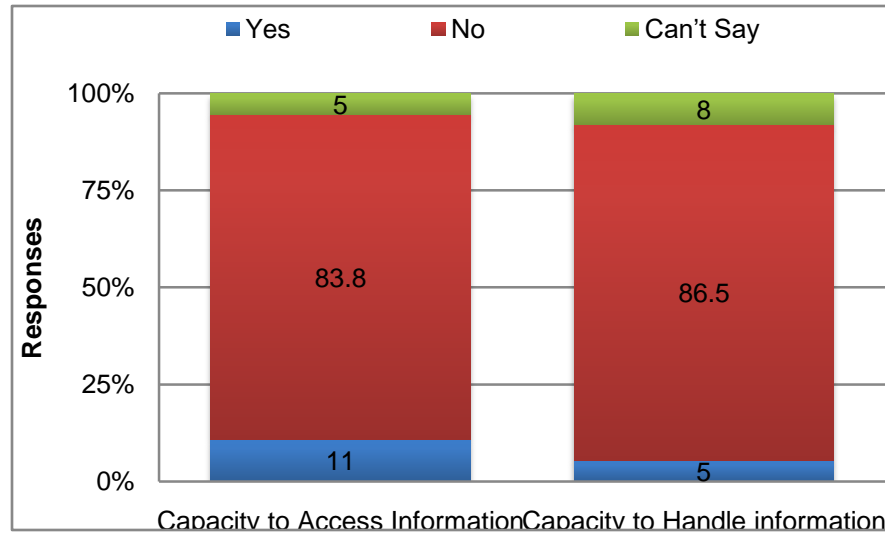


that the present scenario of mass media needs better regulation, which supports the summary of indicators of Indian communication scenario for first data set.

4.2 Capacity to access and handle relevant information

With the 84% agreement rate, the majority of the respondents of this survey have stated that many sections of Indian society doesn't have enough capacity to access to their relevant information they want for their end use. This response justifies the need for the skill training pertinent to information retrieval and processing. Majority of the respondents, 87%, categorically stated that the common person doesn't have enough capacity to handle the information they

receive at their end for right usage.



4.3 What can be done to improve their information handling capacity
Responses from the survey were converted into text clouding. It suggests that, awareness needs to be created through education and MIL is the major recommendation emerging out of respondents' suggestion to improve the common person's ability to handle the media and information they access on their daily life from the public domain.

4.4 Availability of space to the common person to express his/her views?

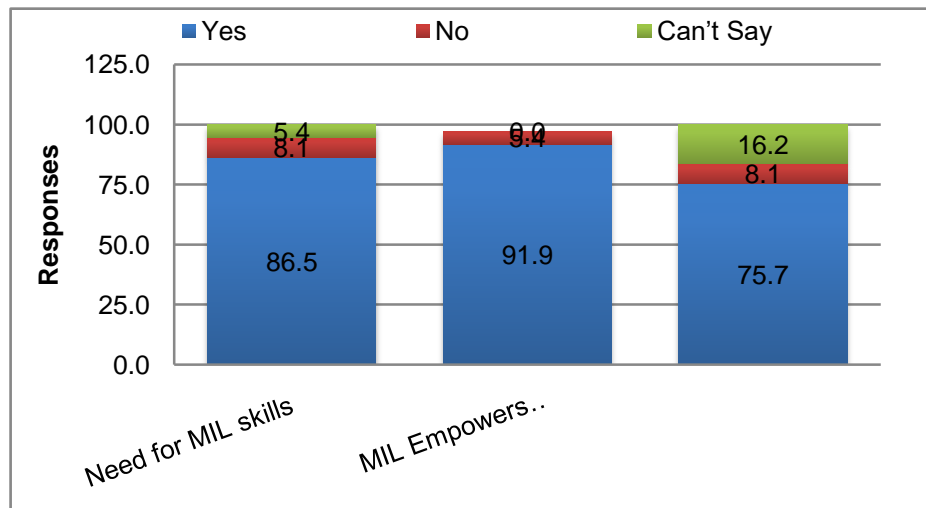
Media Space for common Person	Percent
No, it is not available	81.58
Yes available	15.79
Can't Say	2.63

Majority of the respondents indicated that there is no sufficient space available in the traditional mass media for the common person to express their views and opinions. Those respondents who indicated No in their choice, also made a point that there is an adequate level of space is

available in the digital and online media platform but the skill sets required to access and create information in this medium needs to be introduced.

4.5 Need to provide media literacy skills

Majority of the respondents, 87% strongly indicated that there is a need to provide media literacy skills to common person in order to exercise their right to access and right to express views/opinions/information. Very high percentage, 92% of the respondents said the media



literacy would enable common person's ability to handle variety of information in a better way. Similarly, 76% of the respondents have agreed to the statement that the media literacy training would enhance common person's capacity to create and construct media content in their medium of choice.

4.6 Target Audience for Media Literacy

The respondents choice was highly polarised into the given choice of target audience. The responses are equally distributed to general public (24%), School teachers (22%), young adults (22%) and School Students (23%). Since the media content is omnipresent, majority of the population is exposed to the media. Hence, as the response trend indicates, the media literacy training needs to be targeted every section of the society.

4.7 Areas needs to be covered in the media literacy training programme

Through text clouding, the following are the areas of media literacy training programme needs to be covered as suggested by the respondents:

1. Understanding media and its messages
2. Critically reading of news productions
3. Basics of ownership patterns of media
4. Understanding media businesses
5. Understanding basics of various media creation and construction techniques.

4.8 Recommending Appreciation Programme in Media Literacy

Majority of the respondents 92% recommended the proposal to offer Appreciation Programme in Media Literacy. Nearly half of the respondents suggested to use blended approach of Open and Distance Learning with the Online delivery mode in order to maximise the effective learning process through an intense interactivity with the learners.

5. Excerpts from the Focus Group Discussion:

The following points emerged during the discussion:

1] A detailed discussion initiated on the title of the programme, many members recommended to amend the title as Media and Information Literacy for two reasons – a) World over the concept of media literacy has faced substantial changes in its perspectives due to availability and access to abundance of information as well as media outlets, hence it is imperative to focus on both the media and information for an initiative which is first of its kinds in India. b) it noted that MIL Communication should be offered as a mandatory Ability Skill Oriented Elective for all Undergraduate courses of Indian Universities and Colleges. The members recommended that the title may be changed as Appreciation Programme in Media and Information Literacy.

2] A considerable discussion happened on the programme objectives - Create awareness about an individual and collective rights in relation to MIL; To create awareness about the skills of citizen journalism and participatory media in the contemporary media and information context.

3] The eligibility of the programme was agreed upon as 10 +2 passed students. Hence the minimum entry age limit should accordingly changed to 17 instead of 18 and there is no upper age limit.

4] Nature of the programme was taken up for the discussion, extensive deliberations happened and references were taken from various academic programmes. Finally, members were agreed

that the programme should have 10-12 units worth 4 credits. A project needs to be incorporated in which the learners would undertake some MIL skill oriented activities which will be evaluated for awarding Certification of Participation.

5] Members felt that programme is being an awareness oriented level and in the context of recent UGC circular on CBCS, advised to undertake two initiatives: a) the same programme shall be offered as part of undergraduate programme; b) the same shall be offered with a 4 credits for the undergraduate students of Indian universities and colleges as an elective under the respective institutions' Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) initiative.

6. Summary of Conclusion:

The above data indicates that in Indian context, MIL training would need to concentrate towards two divergent sections of the society - one is, media saturated section and second, the section of have-nots. The section have-nots may be having the basic technological access for their communication but might be lacking the skills to use those facilities effectively to retrieve data for their betterment.

The availability of massive information in the public domain in India, scoring less in regulatory mechanism on media, lack of level playing field among various media stakeholders, and lack of educational avenues to empower common person into a media literate are strongly suggests to have this programme in place as early as possible.

There is a strong encouragement from the professionals of media and information arena to introduce an Appreciation Programme on Media and Information Literacy.

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